

More than Flowers - Empowerment  
By Ambassador Matthew J. Bryza

On this 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of International Women's Day, it is important to recognize that women globally have made significant gains. Despite the progress, vast inequalities persist. The potential of women to contribute to economic growth and prosperity, social progress, peace, and good governance is still untapped in too many places. Gender-based violence not only destroys the lives of individual girls and women, families, and communities, but also robs the world of the talent it urgently needs.

As the world marks International Women's Day, Secretary Hillary Clinton will participate in a celebration in Washington, D.C. with First Lady Michelle Obama to announce the International Women of Courage Awards to 10 honorees from around the globe. The recipients represent the women who work in their countries against corruption and injustice, and who fight for human rights, good governance and economic opportunity. They are agents of change. Overcoming poverty, discrimination, and violence, the honorees not only champion the rights of women and girls, but also serve as an inspiration to us all.

If we are to build a more peaceful, prosperous, and just world, we cannot leave half the population behind. We cannot successfully tackle the challenges that confront us in relation to the environment, security, economics, development, and more, if women are not engaged at every level of society.

The U.S. is committed to the empowerment of women not just because it is the right thing to do, but also because it is the smart thing to do. When women make progress, countries make progress. A mountain of research shows that investments in women correlate positively with alleviating poverty and increasing prosperity. The education of a girl is the most effective development investment that can be made with enormous positive consequences for her future and her family's future.

My wife, Zeyno, and I both recognize the importance of women's empowerment. On March 7, we hosted a group of Azerbaijani women entrepreneurs and discussed with them the challenges and opportunities women face in Azerbaijan. This is the first of an ongoing dialogue we intend to hold with Azerbaijani women from all sectors and regions. Working together with Azerbaijan's citizens, government, non-governmental organizations and international partners, we seek to identify actions that we, along with our Azerbaijani partners, can take to advance the

cause of women so that Azerbaijan can benefit from the talents and full potential of its women.

Circumscribing women's participation and leaving their potential untapped, shortchanges women and shortchanges our world. We vitally need women's talents, experiences, and leadership. Today we celebrate the contributions of women. Everywhere they are making a difference. Many do so with great courage and often at great personal risk. They are changing the world for the better. Today, we salute all Women of Courage.